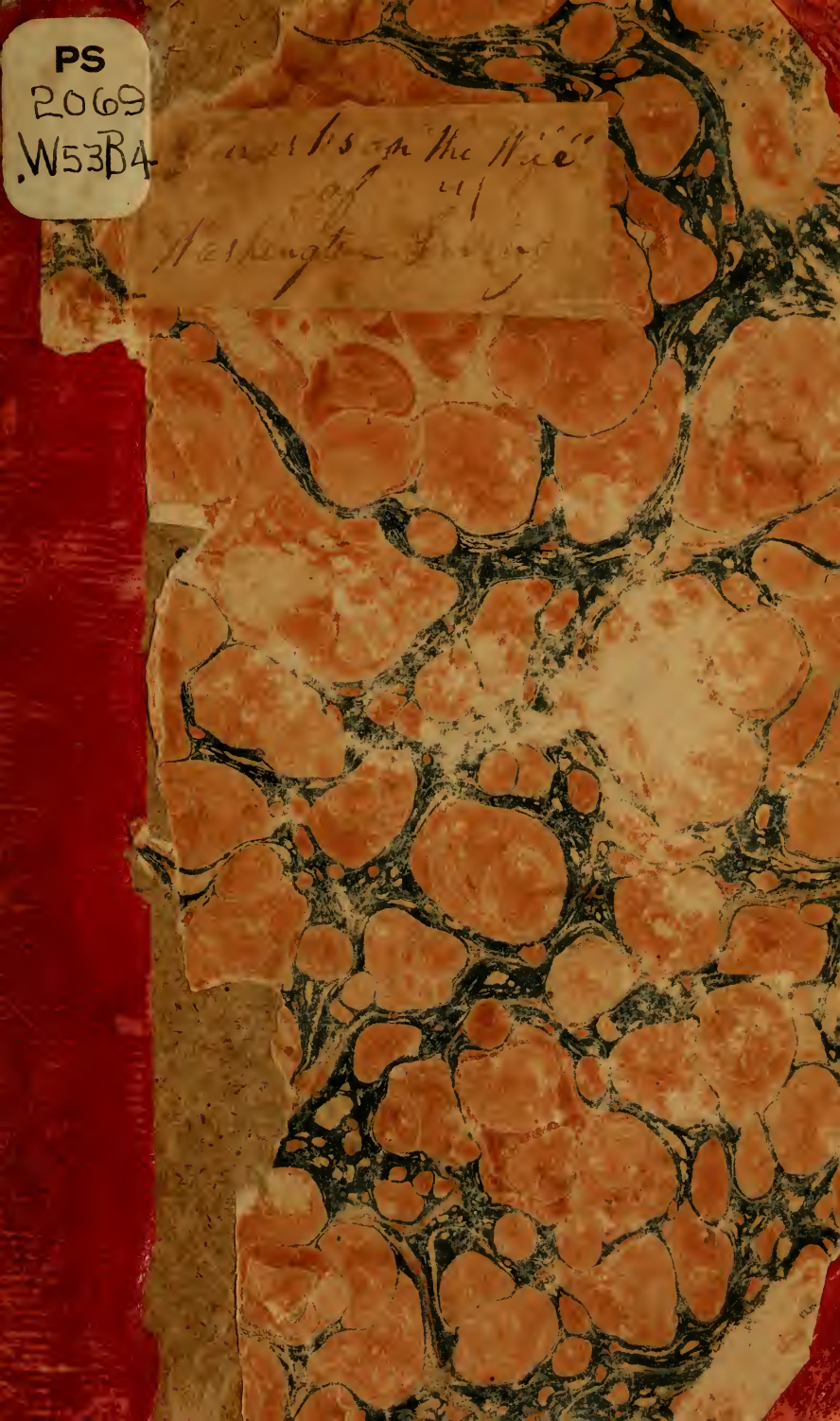


PS

2069

W53B4

Notes on the life
of
Washington Irving





222





for the greater caution, the Author thinks
proper to disavow all Considerations,
either political or personal as it respects
Mr. Clinton — he is noticed only as one of our
fine writers —

Translation of the Motto —

Wife, do you not know that your Husband,
as a Speculator, is never to fail, and so an
invincible? — spare your cobwebs —

a further Lesson from the Master

» ————— Mediocribus esse Poetis

» Non Homines Non Di — concedere —

Anglice — Latine

Neither Men or Gods tolerate Mediocrity
in fine writers; nothing not consistent with
judgment or Taste; not the least want
of the "Ingenium", of the "Mens", of the "spiritus
of the "Uis", either in the "Poetus or the
"Orator", paradoxa —

for the
Benson, Esq.
BRIEF REMARKS

ON THE

“ WIFE ”

of the
OF

WASHINGTON IRVING.

“ Uxor invicti——esse nescis ?

“ Mitte singultus,——”

HOR.

NEW-YORK :

PRINTED BY GRATTAN AND BANKS,

Corner of Nassau & Spruce Streets.

.....

1819.

PS2069
W53B4

1156B7
N30 +2

2445
BRIEF REMARKS

ON THE

“WIFE”

OF

WASHINGTON IRVING.



OUR countryman, Mr. Washington Irving, now in England, is occupied, it seems, in a work he calls “*The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman*,” coming out in numbers; No. 1 containing an article entitled as above, “THE WIFE;” consisting of an *observation*, a *simile* to illustrate it, and a *narrative* or *fact* to prove it. A few brief remarks on each in their order.

The *observation* may be abbreviated, and without injury to it, to import, “that women sustain the reverses of fortune with fortitude; that disasters, which break down the spirit of a man, call forth all their energies; and that the wife is the supporter of the husband under misfortune;” Now, all this is very true, but is it not also very trite? Can it be a question, whether the wife possesses not, and, at least equal to what we can boast of it, for the husband, the “*ne cede malis, sed contra audentior ito*;” never to yield to the ills of life; on the contrary, the more numerous and sore, she the more collected and unwearied to resist them? Her spirit in another

view of it. The husband, dubious of succeeding, and whatever the purpose, may pause, and falter, and, if left unsustained by the wife, would ultimately faint and abandon—no hesitation or retrospect with her; witness Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth; perhaps his masterpiece, if any thing can be selected from him so to be distinguished. The character within the limits of truth and nature, still may it not be asked, whether a limit to the mind that could conceive it? so that really Mr. Irving has taught us nothing we did not know before; yet, as we are to believe, he meant to say something complimentary or civil to the sex, possibly to make amends for a delinquency in never having addressed one of them in the "*way of courtship*," it might be viewed as ungracious were it otherwise than well received.

The *simile* runs thus;—"As the vine, which has long twined its grateful foliage around the oak, and been lifted up by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling round it with its caressing tendrils, and bind its shattered boughs; so it is beautifully ordered by providence that woman, who is the *mere* dependant and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity, winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head and binding up the broken heart."—

I object to it, as too long—*count the folio*, and probably it will be found as long again, either as

Addison's, "So the staunch Hound, &c." or his, "So when an Angel, &c.," hitherto the longest *on record*. It is irksome to the mind to be detained in examining, as it proceeds, whether the simile, and the person or thing to be likened, agree throughout, as much so as to overlook a boy's exercise in making of Latin to see if no false concord.

I use the phrases, *count the folio*, and *on record*, presuming them to be familiar to Mr. Irving, he having been once engaged in the study of the Law. He quitted it because, as is supposed, rather dry, and on a calculation, that although he might improve by it in the faculty of thought or judgment, he would suffer proportionably in his native gift of imagination; and in which he was doubtless correct, it not being impossible that, had he continued in it a portion of time longer, he would have found himself utterly unequal to his *Knickerbocker* History of New-York; certainly a total absence of *QUIZ*, the very life and spirit of it. The like as to his story of Rip Van Winkle and his Wife of the Kaat's Kill. Pray what makes Mr. Irving spell the Old Dutch name Kat's Kill with double *a*? It has also a place as an article in the Sketch Book, and as of the *Knickerbocker* genus of composition, inasmuch as both Rip and his Wife are wholly of Mr. Irving's *creation*, there never having been any such *ens* or existence *in rerum naturæ* as a scolding Dutch Wife. Not that the Dutch Wife never scolds; she scolds her servants; she scolds her neighbours; but she never scolds in quality

as *Wife* ; she never scolds her *Husband*.—This has been ascribed by some to the judicious manner in which the Dutch formulary of matrimony is framed, where, instead of relying on obey, honour, love, and so forth, none of them of import so definite as to preclude construction, the Wife is made explicitly to promise to be *silent* ; and though not exactly married within the four walls of a church, which has been imagined to add to the solemnity of the ceremony, it must be acknowledged on all hands, that no where is the wife found so scrupulously observant of the marriage vow as among the Dutch.

The non-existence of the Scolding Wife involves the non-existence of its correlative, the Henpecked Husband. Indeed there is no word in the Dutch answering to the English henpeck. Should any conceited Englishman take occasion, from this single instance of defect in the Dutch, to boast of the copiousness of his own, *language*, I would remind him, there are innumerable words and phrases in French not to be expressed in English. Vide Simond's *Travels passim*.

From the preface to the Van Winkle article, it appears Mr. Irving intended it as a supplement or sequel to his History of New-York. Acute critics have thought Homer ought to have stopped at the Iliad, but his muse grew vain, "*in plausus ambitiosa* ;" a note on the passage takes a distinction between *plaudit* and *fame* ; and "like a little demon whispered, Homer write *more*," and he wrote the Odyssey ; sup-

posing however, for the sake of illustration, the History to be Mr. Irving's Iliad, and the Article his Odyssey, I do not think he has *fallen off* much, if any thing, and that he is as funny and fanciful in the last as in the first.

I object further to the simile as wanting simplicity and unity, the "*simplex duntaxat et unum*," of the MASTER. "The great secret in writing," says the compiler of a recent *school-book* with a few plain sensible pages on style, "is to know when to be *simple*."

The simile sets out with likening the wife to the vine twining itself around the oak. It was of the vineti-culture of the ancients, to add a word, my *mite*, to the nomenclature, to lead or train the vine, in order to expose the clusters to the sun, upwards along the trunk of a tree to the boughs; the tree however was the elm and not the oak. "*Ulmisque adjungere vites*," to adjoin the vines to the elms, says Virgil. "*Ego vidi pampineis oneratam vitibus ulmum*," I have seen the elm burdened with the vine luxuriant in shoots, says Ovid. The wife is not only the vine; but, by twining, or leading, or training, herself around the tree, she becomes her own vine-dresser; the instant thereafter, however, the tree, being spoken of as *lifting up* the vine to its boughs, is apparently the vine-dresser. There obviously is some confusion or interference here, and how to explain it I am altogether at a loss; to make the hardy

plant *stoop down*, and *lift up*, being certainly beyond my contrivance.

For the sake of accuracy in citation, I repeat Mr. Irving's epithet for the oak, the *hardy* plant; the prose *hardy* plant is one that will bear frost, and drought, and to be browsed and cropt, and yet thrive.

The wife is not only a vine and a vine-dresser; but almost instantly again, still as wife, she is, as it were, likened to a small hawser passed round a ship along her sides in a tempest, the sea-term for it I think is *frapping*, to save her, when her fastenings are giving way, from separating, "She clings round the tree to bind up its shattered boughs when rifted by the thunderbolt;" the precise condition of the tree in the case cited from Ovid, "*sævo fulmine tacta Jovis*," touched or struck by Jove's dire lightning; but there, as we have seen, the vine, instead of performing a good office to the tree, avails herself of its boughs, shattered as they may be, for her own accommodation. Ultimately the wife becomes the prophet, or rather, as we are in New-Testament times, a female Barnabas, a daughter of *Consolation*, "She is to bind up her broken-hearted husband."

I am aware Mr. Irving may vouch, as *precedent* for *multifariousness* of figure and imagery, the following much admired passage from the discourse of De Witt Clinton, Esq. before the *literary* and *philosophical* Society, he being *President*. After inveighing, and very properly, against "*invective* in our

“ *political* writings, that it has greatly tended to injure our *national character*, and that it has arisen from the indiscriminate applause conferred on certain eminent *political* writers,” the passage alluded to follows :—“ *We* imitate, what we are taught to admire, and unfortunately we have *aped* their boldness of *invective*, and fierceness of denunciation, without exhibiting those fascinations of genius which operate like the cestus of Venus, conceal deformity, and brighten all the charms of beauty and *grace*. Junius arose in the literary, like a comet in the natural world, menacing PESTILENCE and WAR, and denouncing, in a style of boldness and *invective*, the *constituted authorities* of Great Britain. He created a new era in *political* writing ; his works have become the archetype and text book of *political* authors ; and every juvenile writer, who enters the *political* lists, endeavours to bend the bow of Ulysses, and, striving to make up in venom what he wants in vigour, mistakes scurrility for satire, and ribaldry for wit, and confounds the natron of Egypt with the salt of Attica.”

If the sentence immediately preceding where Junius, the subject of the simile, is mentioned, is to be viewed as context, then we have Junius, in the first place, the cestus or girdle of the Queen of Love *exhibiting* fascinations ; secondly, we have him a comet ; thirdly, an archetype ; fourthly, a text book ; fifthly, the bow of Ulysses, which our juvenile writers, when they enter the *Lists*, strive to bend and

so *tilt* with the *Arrow* as doubtless more handy than as heretofore, with the *Spear*; and sixthly and lastly, salt, seasoning, grateful to the palate or *Taste*, and with which they *confound* their natron, the sal ammoniac of the shops, offensive to the smell, and pungent, in the extreme, so that the phial containing it applied to the nostril nigh takes away your breath. “Enough to vex one, even if a Saint,” almost to say, confound them for it!

The Narrative.

According to Mr. Irving, it was casually *recalled to his mind* by observations made on a previous occasion by another, which he, at the moment, was repeating in the article, and so not *originally* in his view as a component part of it. It may be reduced to the following facts. “A friend of Mr. Irving
 “marries a beautiful accomplished girl; to the husband he gives the name of Leslie, and to the wife
 “the name of Mary; the latter the Heroine of the
 “article furnishing the name, “THE WIFE.” Leslie
 “has an ample fortune, and it was his *mishap* to
 “embark it in large *speculations*, and by sudden
 “*disasters*, it is swept from him, and he reduced to
 “almost penury—for a time he keeps his situation
 “to himself; at length he comes to Mr. Irving one
 “day, and relates it to him. Mr. Irving inquires of
 “him, whether his wife knows it; at which he bursts
 “into tears, and cries, for God’s sake, if you have any
 “pity on me, don’t mention my wife!” Must we not intend here that Mr. Irving remains to be notified, that

invocation of the DEITY as *expletive*, no longer tolerated?—" Leslie finally discloses it to her, and when " Mr. Irving asks him how she bore it? he replies, " like an *angel*." Angels being *preserved* from adversity by a POWER, an attribute of which, " *not subject to accidents*," how are we to know how they would bear it?—One, it is true, *failed*, and most disasterously so; and how he bears it, we, of our own race, and wofully to our own cost, know.

" Leslie then disposes of his dwelling house, and " sells all his *splendid* furniture except his wife's " *harp*, and takes a small cottage in the country, a " few miles from town. Mr. Irving one evening accompanied him to the cottage, and, as they approached it, they heard the sound of music; it was " Mary's voice singing a little air of which her husband was peculiarly fond." Does not Mr. Irving, by making Mary to *sing*, make her a little too *light-hearted*? " She, expecting her husband, had set " out a table, under a beautiful tree behind the cottage, with some delicious strawberries she had " been gathering, and excellent cream for him."

It is to be collected from the narrative, that Mr. Irving has laid the scene in New-York; now, it may be said, with very little, if any, deviation from the literal truth, that the whole island shews neither cottage nor dairy, and the few roods left untilled, scarce soil sufficient to nurture a strawberry vine. We will perceive whence the mistake, upon advert- ing to it, that the article was written in England,

where a portion of the habitation is cottage, and the gardens furnish strawberries, and the pastures milk, most abundantly; and that Mr. Irving has been so long abroad, that the topography of the spot, his home, has passed from his remembrance.

The mistake by him is as to *place*. A similar mistake by Sir Henry Clinton, the British Commander, at the battle of Monmouth, in the war of our revolution as to *time*. A week passed before he prepared his despatch, or his report of it, to his government, and at the close he writes, "that he took the position from whence the enemy had been first driven after they had quitted the plain; and, having reposed the troops till ten at night, to avoid the excessive heat of the day, he took advantage of the moonlight to rejoin General Knyphausen."

—It was already the second quarter of the moon and the evening consequently light, so that even the circumstance, that there was an eclipse of the sun on the 25th of the month, and of course no moonlight so late as at ten in the evening of the 28th, the day of the battle, never suggested itself to his recollection. Again,—a similar mistake by a general of our own, as to *event*. The battle of Bridgewater was on the 25th July, 1819; it commenced about the close of the day, but after three or four hours, the combatants not being able to distinguish friend from foe, in the dark, the firing ceased on both sides, and, as it were by concert, at the same moment. For the numbers engaged, and the time it lasted, sel-

dom a more well fought little fight. The British fell back to collect and form anew, and wait for the dawn, to advance again; which they did, and, finding none to oppose them, took peaceable possession of the ground, and of the cannon they lost the preceding evening. Our troops returned to their encampment on the Niagara, where they arrived about 12 o'clock at NIGHT. The General's report of the battle is dated a fortnight thereafter, by which time, it would seem, he had conceived it to have issued in victory. His words are, "As I was *retiring* from the field, I *saw* and *felt* that the *victory* was *complete* on our part, if proper measures were promptly adopted to *secure* it," The *improvement* of these three several instances of *mistake* is, that when to relate as from our own testimony, "there is nothing like the time and place *present*," lest, by waiting, our memory should either, not serve us to remember *all*, or serve us overmuch, and so remember *more* than *all*.

The narrative winds up, "that the world has since "gone prosperously with Leslie, and that his life "has been a happy one;" but, referring to the meeting when the regale of strawberries and cream, "that he never afterwards experienced a moment of "such *unutterable* felicity."

Ought not Mr. Irving, according to *true drama*, to have left him in the cottage?—If the heroes and heroines, who die on the stage, were all brought back to life, would not the tragedy, as to its effect to "*wake* the soul, and *mend* the heart," be entire-

ly spoiled by it?—At the same time, for the sake of verisimilitude in the fiction, it is perhaps as well the narrative should end as it does; it being undoubtedly according to the usual or natural course of things, for one *in business*, and especially if embarked in *speculations*, and whether large or not, or he a fortune or not, quite immaterial, to fail, and give up, and sell off, and again, and within less time than from the crescent to the full orb, in credit, and cash, and as busy, and prosperous, as ever. In truth, and in a sense, a *speculator* never fails. *Insolvency* and not a failure, however in *terms*, not always a contradiction in *fact*. Direful the stroke indeed if not a *fibre* of the root left, as having escaped untouched, to nourish the stock for the shattered boughs to shoot forth anew !

The speculator of our own age, emphatically so, Napoleon Bonaparte, an instance in point.—He has failed four times.—The third time he took the *benefit of the act*, and went to Elba.—The fourth time, the period of his career was short; scarce beyond the usual bank credit; and he is now *within the limits* in St. Helena; and notwithstanding he each time went off, leaving his indorsers *in the lurch*, it is surmised he has *friends*, cherishing a hope he may yet be liberated, and ready again to *trust* him; so that it is difficult to pronounce definitively even as to him.

A little *Narrative* of my own.

I was lately at tea, on an invitation from a family where I visit—the party not numerous ; and the article, *THE WIFE*, becoming a subject of the conversation, during the evening, one of the ladies, Mrs. A., repeated the passage from the simile, and which, as I understood, she had committed to memory for the beauty of it:—“ Woman, the stay and solace of
 “ man, when smitten with sudden calamity ; ‘wind-
 “ ing herself into the rugged recesses of his nature ;
 “ tenderly supporting the drooping head, and bind-
 “ ing up the broken heart ;” and, addressing herself to Mrs. B., asked her what she thought of it, and whether it was not beautiful ? Mrs. B., avoiding a direct answer, expressed herself, “ I like taste and
 “ style, as far as I can judge of it, as well as others ;
 “ but when I read, I look for something more, and
 “ which I am sure I will not find if I do not under-
 “ stand what I do read. I have a husband ; no wo-
 “ man ever had a better ; and my fear is that I am
 “ not thankful enough for him ; and should misfor-
 “ tunes overtake him, I hope it will be given to me
 “ to know I am to bear a full share of them ; in
 “ sickness, these hands, and no others, shall support
 “ his drooping head ; but how am I to understand
 “ that he has recesses in his nature, and that they
 “ are rugged, and that I am to wind myself into
 “ them ; indeed, and after all, Mr. Irving may write
 “ very beautifully and very movingly about it, still
 “ I make it a query, whether one never married can

“ know any more of the love between husband and
“ wife, than, as they sometimes say, one born blind
“ can of colours ?—“ Does it occur to you, madam,
“ replied Mrs. C., that the famous Doctor Saunder-
“ son, though blind from the first year from his
“ birth, lectured on light.” “ True,” rejoined Mrs.
D., the widow of a College Professor ; “ but then it
“ was, as my husband would say, for I remember
“ his very words, scientifically or *artificially* only,
“ and not as ever having *enjoyed* vision.”—

Here the discussion ended.

FINIS.

Whatever may be thought of the
critical powers of this author, no per-
son can deny that he showed judge-
ment in not placing his name upon
the title page. Whatever hope of pre-
venting Irving from receiving the ju-
dicial notice for his writings, there might
have been in 1819, at this time he is
far beyond the petty malicious
attacks of such schoolboy crit-
ics as is the writer of these Re-
marks —



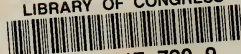




It would be a great pity if you were to
lose your wife but
you will be a Charles &
I wish to see you. It
is impossible for
me either to obtain a
marriage or a good a negot-
iation with woman or men.
and the worthy & affectionate
one - your friend.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 016 117 720 9